



Debra Stanley [Edited] *

Oral History Transcription

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Interviewed by:	Katie Madonna Lee
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Transcribed by:	Zoë Morgan, Student Worker, Civil Rights Heritage Center
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Summary:	Debra Stanley began work at the Chapin Street Health Clinic before she discovered her passion: working with and educating the HIV and AIDS community in South Bend. What began as volunteer work with AIDS Ministries quickly changed to a position on staff. Stanley created a prevention program where she educated youth and adults about how to prevent the contraction of STDs, and how to minimize the spread of them. Stanley later created her own organization, Imani Unidad, that provided counseling services and support for the community.

* This transcript is for an edited version of the interview audio. Extraneous questions from the interviewer were removed. For access to the unedited version, contact either the Civil Rights Heritage Center at crhc.iusb.edu or the IU South Bend Archives at library.iusb.edu.

0:00:00 [Katie Madonna Lee] So I'll start by asking you your name and where you're from.

[Debra Stanley] My name is Debra Stanley. Where was I born? I was born here in South Bend, Indiana. So I lived here in South Bend until the age of ten. At which point, my family moved to Oakland, California. So that's where I came to fruition, and where I was fed spiritually, and globally, and all that kind of stuff.

[KL] And culturally.

[DS] Yeah, and culturally, and all of that stuff. Which allows me to live well here.

[KL] So when you came back to South Bend, when was that?

[DS] In 1989. Mm-hm.

[KL] Okay. Was it for family reasons? Or was that for college?

0:00:40 [DS] Right, right. So everybody in my family, when I say my family moved, my mother and all my brothers and sisters moved to California. So my father was still here. So over the years, a few of us had come back to live with him, to be around him. At a certain point, his mother, his sisters, he had no family left but his children. So I had a brother who came to stay a few years, a sister who came to stay a few years. I'm the only one that came and stayed.

[KL] I see.

[DS] Yeah, so I came, was the last one to come. Then I got him when he needed care and all of that stuff. So by that time, my son had moved here and started his family. So now I have grandchildren and I'm not gonna leave them.

[KL] You're rooted now.

[DS] Yes, I'm rooted here. Mm-hm.

[KL] How did you get involved in social work?

0:01:31 [DS] Well, after living in California and doing the little stint with Corporate America, working for State Government... So it was kind of like, coming

back here, while I do say I came for my father, it was also for me. Because I was also in my, I'll call it a mid-life crisis, even though I don't think that was half of my life yet.

[KL] Yeah.

[DS] So this was, "Who am I? What am I going to do with the rest of my life?", sort of thing. So it was kind of like trying something new. Yeah. Kind of like, even having my daughter and being introduced to this whole new world of children with special needs, you know.

[KL] Yeah, yeah.

0:02:18 [DS] Anyway, so the whole world of Social Services... "Yeah, let's try that". Cause there's always kind of been something in my soul, even when I worked for the telephone company, it was always as an advocate. This is Corporate America, they're into selling their product, but you can't push it down little old ladies' throats. So I worked in the business office, so you'd have an installer who would get points if he could sell the trim line, push button, touch tone, or princess phone or something to a little old lady who all she wanted was a black rotary dial phone. So yeah, I'm fixing to uninstall that. You ain't getting those points, dude. I'm in the business office to say, "The only points you get is if people keep the equipment". You know? So to stop that kind of bullying.

[KL] Yeah, it is.

0:03:12 [DS] Then when I worked for the State Government, I worked at San Quentin. During the tenure there, the four years there, doing things like calling in the EEOC about the treatment of women. Being put outside the prison walls as a breach of security because I refused to lie on inmates. Just all kind of stuff like that. So this whole— and probably is kind of from the role I had as family. As a family person, I was kind of like the protector of my younger brothers and sisters. Taught them all how to fight, would stand up for them. So that was kind of part of my nature. So this whole working in the world of Social Services just, probably where I should've been working all that time.

[KL] So then how did you hook up with AIDS Ministries?

0:04:05 [DS] My very first job in this community, they actually, Brother Roy at Catholic Charities called a girlfriend of mine that was working at the Y. So anyway, she was cool with her position. They had this new— they were going into this foray of... So Catholic Charities used to hire people to work at other Social Service agencies. So anyway, she didn't want the job position, but she told him about me. So he called me, and so I had this interview. Catholic Charities hired me to work at the Chapin Street Clinic,

which was in the Chapin Street Health Clinic. Which was a clinic for people without access to health insurance.

0:04:58 So it was that whole foray into providing for the whole person, taking a more holistic approach. I'm not a medical person, but I was hired to address all their social needs. If somebody was eligible for insurance, make sure they got it. If somebody needed food stamps, make sure they got it. If they were homeless, connect them with a homeless shelter, get them housing. You know, all those kinds of things so that they could focus on their physical, medical health. Which was where I was introduced to people who were living with HIV and AIDS. We start getting people in there and nobody there knew anything about HIV and AIDS in the medical community. I'm telling you. And even worse, it was like nobody seemed like they wanted to know anything about it.

[KL] What year was this?

[DS] This was 1992. Yes. So it wasn't—

[KL] It wasn't like '86 where they were still like, "What is it?"

0:06:06 [DS] Right. So this is the beginning, just now coming to this community. I had heard that the first persons that the clinic had had was like a couple in their '50s. A guy had had heart surgery and a transfusion, and he became positive and then infected his wife. That was like the first person they had. So anyway, people would always be, they'd come to me, people would say, okay like they have diabetes and they need this. Or somebody has rheumatoid arthritis, they need a lift here, they can't get out. So I'm calling all over town trying to get peoples' needs met. The first time they came to me with this guy, and it was kind of like, "He has AIDS". It was kind of like whispered, a whispered something. I didn't know nothing about AIDS either, so it was no biggie. "What is AIDS?" "I don't know". Anyway, what does the guy need? That's all I wanted to know. So most of what I did was in people's homes. So they'd give me this guy, and it was a guy they had had to come to and ask a few times to be tested because he didn't believe that he had that. Finally, when he consented on like the third day to be tested, yes, he had AIDS. Again, it was a time where people were getting their HIV and AIDS diagnosis at the same time.

[KL] Okay.

0:07:31 [DS] Because people weren't seeking care. They were presenting at emergency rooms or doctors offices really sick. So he wasn't the first case in this community, but it was one of the first cases. It was early in the whole thing for us. So I go out to the house and this guy is pretty emaciated. Big belly, big swollen feet, but just skin and bones everywhere else. So what he wanted was a couch and a bed because the springs and

stuff hurt his body. So he wanted some cushion, something soft. Anyway, I'm calling around and calling around, and somebody told me about AIDS Ministries. Which was an organization that was just beginning to emerge from hiding itself. Because again, if you think back to those days, the whole notion was to protect people. So you don't want to advertise, "Here we are at AIDS Ministries", with people with AIDS going in and out. Cause people— that was Ryan White's house got burned down, remember?

[KL] Yeah, yeah.

[DS] Some pretty horrible things. Then the little boys, the three little brothers who were hemophiliacs, they were being denied access to school. So some horrible things were going on right here in Indiana, plus nationally. And always the negative, ugly stuff gets the front page headlines.

[KL] Yes, exactly.

0:09:06 [DS] So, of course, AIDS ministries hid to try to protect those they were serving. Anyway, I find out about this organization, so I'm calling them. "Here's the presenting case. I have this guy who needs a bed, a couch, a da da da...". They had just been donated a bunch of hospital beds. "Finally!" Anyway, they say, "Okay, we'll bring the guy a bed". So I ask him, he says it's okay, and I give them the name and address. So they deliver the bed. Afterwards, he calls me. He was very upset; he was very hurt. He was saying, "They delivered the bed, the social worker came, she wouldn't go into the house. She wouldn't shake their hand, she wouldn't...". I'm like, "What?" They lived upstairs, so the people that delivered the bed obviously went on up there and there wasn't any problem. But this social worker upset them.

0:10:00 So I call AIDS Ministries back and I asked them could I come and talk to them. I'm like, "Well this was the guy's experience. What happened?" I'm meeting with the director and social worker, both, and they're sitting there. "Well, they were afraid...". "Well afraid of what?" She said, "Well, you know, I was surprised at how he looked". I'm like, "Okay, you work with people, you've been working with people with AIDS for the longest. What's the surprise with that?" The truth came out that it was her first time, it was a white female, her first time going to the West side of South Bend. It was these two black men, so she didn't want to go into, she was afraid for her safety. So I'm like, "Okay. That's real, we can deal with that".

[KL] Yeah.

0:10:49 [DS] "Let me just say this, that two gay guys, they don't want you. Okay? Second thing, the guy is so sick, you thump him in the forehead even if he did try something. It's over". Anyway, at that time, again, this whole thing

that they never worked with a black person before— Even though the very first person in this community who had AIDS was St. Juice. I think his name was August St. Juice, he was a black man. He was a Haitian. But I think that was when the Health Department was dealing with everything. So the Health Department took care of him. So anyway, when I got to AIDS ministries, they really didn't have any programs or anything. It was just a bunch of volunteers. At that time, they asked me would I come and volunteer for them. I was like, "No way, José. You guys just need to get your act together". You know, arrogant little twit was I.

[overlapping conversation]

0:11:53 [DS] So I go away, and I go back to the Clinic. So at the Clinic again. So here we are at the Clinic, and we're diagnosing people with syphilis, gonorrhea, with all kind of teenage pregnancies. A guys came in there with gonorrhea in his mouth, and da da da da da. Anyway, there's nothing in place to help these people, so I'm getting frustrated. Nobody's doing anything about prevention. Then, one day we get this sixteen-year-old girl, no fourteen. Fourteen-year-old young lady, in there for the third time in a sixth month period with gonorrhea and chlamydia. Fourteen years old. So her mother was in there, and her mother's all stressed out. "What are we gonna do? What are we gonna—?" So they're all abuzz. "What can we do? What can we do?" So they decide to leave the saline out of the solution so the shot will hurt. I'm like, "Okay. Hello, people? Here's a child presenting to us for the third time in a sixth month period with the same... Here's a child already in a lot of pain. Why would we inflict more pain and validate, obviously, this something that she believes about herself?"

[KL] Yeah, yeah.

0:13:06 [DS] Then I go to her mother, "Do you know what they're about to do to your child?" So the mother says, "I don't know what to do. She's just out of control. Da da da da da". I'm like, "Okay, well this is what we can do. We can try to educate this child. We can try to help her. We can try to talk to her, see what's going on with her". "Would you be willing?" I said, "Yeah". I said, "Well let me come to the house". I said, "Well, and we don't want her to be a target. So get all your children because even if you have younger children, it's information they'll need to know".

[KL] Yeah.

0:13:41 [DS] "Get grandma and grandpa. Get the neighbors. Whoever. Let's just turn this into a party". So anyway, I did that and I went out to that house. I start talking around the Clinic, and we set up this whole system that anybody with a social health issue like that, they would refer to me. Then I'd refer them to myself and I'd go to their house. Then I talked to the

pharmacist who had a friend in Michigan City that could get me some condoms. So she'd bring me the condoms, we'd go across the street. She'd take them out of her trunk and put them in my trunk. Because the whole premise, which I call "bull-crapola", that's my personal opinion, of not saying or doing anything for these people was because they were a Catholic organization.

[KL] Chapin Street?

[DS] Yes.

[KL] Really?

[DS] Yes, they were started by... They were an affiliation, a subsidiary of Saint Joseph Regional Medical Center. Saint Joe Hospital.

[KL] Okay.

[DS] Which is Catholic.

[KL] Yeah.

0:14:40 [DS] Anyway, so okay, the Clinic does a lot of good. We will not mess with that. So I set up this whole system, and that a lot of people who were equally frustrated bought into. There were doctors in there who would make the referral, everybody made the referral, but who would just start sharing information with me and where I could get more information. So I'm calling all over the country learning as much as I can about HIV and AIDS, STDs. Hooked up with Planned Parenthood, went over there for information. Then, I go back to AIDS Ministries, and because, humbly this time, not arrogant and cocky, I needed a base of operations. So it's this whole coming to, and again, I learned that we needed each other. When I got to AIDS Ministries and came back willing to volunteer now, they had no condoms. "Why you ain't got no condoms?"

[KL] I know.

0:15:41 [DS] They were housed now— They were started by the North Indiana Conference of United Methodists, and their first home was in the Methodist Church. They were not housed in Saint Joe Parish. They never asked. I asked the Father who was there at the time, he didn't have a problem. We were renting space. We did whatever we wanted to in our own space. So we could have condoms there. So now I had a place to operate, we had condoms, da da da da. All of that. I start hustling condoms, and that's when I start volunteering. I was volunteering there and still had my part-time job over at the Clinic where I could actually work with people, which is where my heart is.

When I got to AIDS Ministries, there was a half part-time Executive Director, an administrative, a part-time administrative assistant, and everybody else was volunteering. There was a nun who was volunteering, who came and she was going to volunteer maybe 5 hours a week and ended up volunteering 20, 30, 40, 50 hours a week.

[KL] Wow.

0:16:45 [DS] It became her mission too. I think by 1993, they found some part-time funding for me from some nuns, the Sisters of the Precious Blood. Then I was working part-time at AIDS Ministries and part-time at the Clinic. So both parts of me was fulfilled. Over at the Clinic, I could still work with people, and at AIDS Ministries, I could do the whole education thing. Word of mouth, because the HIV community, they talk to each other. So people start coming to me, "Okay, you know, I heard you could do this... I heard you could get this... I heard you could get this...". Let me tell you, I started getting people hooked up with Social Security, food stamps, everything. Let me tell you something else about this crazy community, I could walk in a Social Security office, food stamp office, any office, and access services for people. Nobody ever asked me for any release of information, nothing. They allowed me to conduct business on behalf of these folks. Why? They didn't want those people coming in their offices. All these social service organizations whose whole mission is to help, again, were responding quite horribly to the situation. Again, the whole thing about education was not just about the individuals trying to prevent the spread of HIV, it was all about trying to make this world a better place for people who are already living with HIV and AIDS.

0:18:28 So it's all about educating these places. "Well, what's wrong with y'all?" The institutional, the organizational... And it's interesting because when you look at the churches, so that's like a 20 sum year collection, almost all faith in their tenants, in their guiding principles, had this whole compassionate something for people living with HIV. But, then allowed individuals within the faith to be horrible, to be ugly, to behave badly. AIDS Ministries though, at the time had a religion and AIDS committee, and it was comprised of people of all faiths. When AIDS Ministries first started, their whole goal was to care and comfort people until they died. They actually wanted a housing program, they wanted to be able to provide housing for people who had been evicted from their housing, from their families, from their faith communities, from all of that. So they wanted to try and establish this whole network, a whole new kind of family for folks, and take care of them. So the faith community was there so people could receive last rites, those kinds of things, according to their own faith. We had imams, rabbis, ministers, pastors, preachers, whatever, everybody. It was really cool, but that didn't get the front page coverage. Then, because

of, again, black people were beginning to get infected, they wanted to establish this whole African and American AIDS coalition. They called together all these black people. You know.

[KL] Yeah.

0:20:20 [DS] All the leaders, the movers and shakers of the community. Let me tell you, I kind of felt kind of cool when I got the list and I was on the list with all these people. "Oh wow, I have arrived. I don't know where the heck I had arrived to, but...". That was kind of cool. The other cool thing about having arrived the way I arrived, was I didn't know that there were rules about leadership in this community. I didn't know you couldn't call Executive Directors and ask them questions. I'm glad I didn't, because it was like, one year when we were doing the candle light memorial and we had these people on the committee. So there were two employees there from Parkview.

[KL] Parkview used to be...?

0:21:11 [DS] The Juvenile Justice System, Center. What we were all to do was go back to our organizations and get permission to put the name on the poster. They came back from Parkview and they said that they couldn't do it. I'm like, "Why not?" They said, "Well, we don't know". I got on the phone and I called the Executive Director of Parkview Juvenile Detention Facility and I asked them, "Why not?" He said, "Because I don't want my employees out there with picket signs". I said, "This is not about picketing. The only thing that this says to go on this poster is that you are a compassionate, caring organization. So that if any of your employees are living with HIV, if any of their family members, or even the kids in detention, that you will compassionately care for them and respect them. That's all it says". He said, "Okay".

[KL] Yeah. Well—

[DS] Anyway, when I went back and I told the Committee, the employees there were shocked.

[KL] Yeah, they were like...

[DS] Again, I was glad I came to this not knowing the rules.

[KL] I understand that. 'Cause you got stuff done not knowing—

0:22:26 [DS] Got stuff done not knowing the rules. But see, the whole thing about though that I learned and that I could impart that on others, is that we have a mission here. The whole mission of AIDS Ministries was to create a world that supports and enhances the lives of those living with HIV and AIDS. Well, you can't do that unless you live it in your own house. We had

to be able to stand up. We had to be able to fight for it respectfully. Fight for the rights of people living with HIV and AIDS to live, to be, to exist, to thrive, to be nurtured. All of that. We had to put the love, the caring, the compassion on the front page, they weren't going to do it for us. That was our job. Again, the whole message to the folks that I was working with who had been doing this awhile was, "Okay, it's a new day. We ain't hiding no more. Somebody has got to stand up and shout about this because these things are preventable, preventable, preventable". So when I first started, it was all about educating about HIV and AIDS, but then I found out, I can't educate about HIV and AIDS because people are so afraid. Number one, they're afraid of death, so you got to deal with that. The whole fear of dying. Hey, that's a natural consequence of this life. Interestingly, Christians, who talk all, who sing about the pie in the sky and going to Heaven, no more worries, no more pain, they're the biggest and most fearful of dying on this planet. Okay? Okay.

0:24:14 Human sexuality, human sexual development. I'm talking about HIV and AIDS. A parent: "Well, how do I get my child to stop touching theyself down there?" Number one, where did that come from? But again, how to respond to people's real issue, real concerns, real needs. Then I had to go and learn everything I could about human sexuality to be able to talk to that. I had to— So these are the kinds of barriers that I had to overcome to be able to talk about HIV and AIDS. So here is this whole thing. But then, that whole interesting thing of how many people jump up and talk about sexuality, sexual behaviors, human sexuality, sexual orientation, and don't know jack squat? Have no foundation, no education, no knowledge, no nothing, but always want to talk about beliefs, opinions, and all of that. Anyway, I found it very interesting. Again, how do you go through education, get a Ph.D.— Do you know how many years of schooling that is?

[KL] That's a lot.

[DS] Never, ever, ever have a class on human sexuality or human sexual development. I'm a Psychology major, okay?

[KL] Yeah.

[DS] Number one reason people seek counseling and some sort of sexual something. Okay? Okay. The first introduction was on the fourth level as a, in a senior class, under deviant behavior.

[KL] Are you serious?

[DS] I'm serious.

[KL] So, it's classified, even academia, as sex equals deviance? Even if—

0:26:01 [DS] It's a taboo. You go and look, where is it required? Where is there required learning anywhere? Even when we go into the schools, they may even have a health book with that chapter. That chapter is skipped over. All the way up the ladder, in most cases. People are not equipped to deal with it. They don't have the foundation; they don't have the knowledge. So here is this whole societal expectation, especially with young people, children will be responsible, respectful, but nobody's equipping them with the knowledge or skills or anything. Even for me; let me tell you the things I learned about me. I told you I moved here from Oakland, California. So where did HIV and AIDS come to prominence? Right across the bridge. How come I didn't know nothing? 'Cause I was a good girl. So when I got my *Essence and Ebony* magazine with a HIV article, pfft, turn the page, it ain't about me. Come on the TV, turn it to a different channel. I'm a good girl. Okay?

So again, I brought to this that whole understanding of real people, of real... So it wasn't, I was not like one of those Act Up kind of people. Not that, now I respect Act Up, they had their place and their time, but I didn't come to it like that because again, I was one of those people: in denial about a whole lot of things. So, anyway, yeah.

0:27:33 [KL] I guess one of the things with the education part, do you feel like a lot of people were resistant to the education? Like, especially the homosexual population. Were they— When you first, this is probably personal, but when you first started working with people with HIV populations in this community in the '90s, were most of them of the gay, lesbian, trans population?

[DS] Right. Well it was all, but it wasn't just gay. It wasn't... I don't know to this day if we've ever had a lesbian in our community who was HIV positive.

[KL] Okay.

[DS] I don't know that. It's not been documented. Primarily men who have sex with men.

[KL] Yeah.

0:28:11 [DS] So, we don't even use the whole gay, lesbian, because this is a whole people thing. So, people get to define themselves, and so it's really presumptuous. So again, it's men who were having sex with men, and not even all. I've been this advocate for taking the whole men having sex with men thing, and being more about behaviors. The specific behaviors that transmit HIV. Because again, I believe that help de-stigmatize HIV. When we talk about men who have sex with men? Because if you are a man

who has sex with another man, if you are in a mutual faithful committed, loving relationship, you're both negative. You ain't at risk.

[KL] Yeah.

0:28:59 [DS] You ain't at risk. What the f-ck is that about? So that whole need to... If we want to do something about the stigma, we have to change those things. This whole thing about homosexuality was new to me. I did not know the depths of this hate mongering and stuff when it came to GLBT community. I didn't know anything alike. I was not raised like that. I was raised in one of them, anybody that got brothers, you know the temptation of calling them stupid and all that. It was just not allowed; name calling was not allowed in my family. Then, my personal experiences growing up in California where people were out and comfortable as school teachers, as professionals, all... Man, how so many gay people helped to save my life. So, I didn't know anything about that. Even when I was here as a teenager, and there were the gay friends, the coolest dancers, they partied with us, they rode around in the car on Friday night with us. I never saw them being treated bad, but I understand it must've happened because most of them left here and moved to Atlanta or New York or somewhere like that. You know?

[KL] Yeah, yeah.

[DS] So somewhere. And I remember a friend in high school that had a cutting party. You know, ditching school. I remember going in the room with him. You know how people would do, and playing like we did it for his sake. So I know they got teased, but I never knew they were horribly mistreated the way that they were.

0:30:40 [KL] So did you feel that... When did it become more populated with, you know, I saw the video, I think it was, "People Like Us". Peter—

[DS] Yeah, "Living in our community". "AIDS in our community".

[KL] Yeah. Peter said one of the reasons he made that was because when he was writing grants, that some of the people he'd go to approach said the only people that they thought had AIDS were gay men and they didn't care. Is that the reaction you got from...?

[DS] Well, see, and again, that's how it was given to us, which is very sad, because if you think— And this is the other thing about education, education is not just providing people with knowledge, but trying to equip them with the skills. You got to be able to think, and think critically. Because, if you pay attention, while on the West Coast, yeah, there were a lot of gay men becoming infected with HIV. On the East Coast, it was injection drug uses all in New Jersey, New York—

[KL] Lots of models.

[DS] Men and women.

[KL] Mm-hm.

0:31:43 [DS] What the heck are you talking about? So this whole, how it got... It's like a lot of things got co-opted and hijacked by the hate mongers. This here was this opportunity for those who needed something else to push their anti-gay agenda, and HIV just happened to be it. It was never about gay people. Now, I'll tell you what gay men, black women, blacks period, young people all have in common, misinformation about who they are as human beings.

[KL] Yeah.

[DS] This whole lack of access to honest, factual information. So, you have gay people who are defined from here as a sexual behavior. Never in their life are they allowed, too many of them, are not allowed to be a total human being. They are looked at and defined solely as a sexual behavior. Because you start talking about homosexuality, what they start talking about?

[KL] Yeah.

[DS] I'm sorry, I'm talking about my school teacher, somebody who taught me Spanish. Why? What's that about?

[KL] Yeah.

0:33:05 [DS] And the fact that we don't even give that thought, we don't give that pause, why are they defined as a sexual behavior? Even if they have never, ever engaged in sexual intercourse in their life.

[KL] Yeah, yeah.

[DS] You know? So all of that kind of stupidity that went unquestioned. But the bigger thing is, this whole need in the United States to always, to constantly create a underclass.

[KL] Yeah.

[DS] No value. They do that to themselves. So you know, the HIV, when it came, the people came with all of these labels. Labels, labels, labels.

[KL] And that was happening in our community? They were being treated like that?

[DS] Mm-hm.

[KL] Has that changed? Did that video help? I mean...

0:34:01 [DS] It helps, like I showed it to a lady the other day who has never told anybody she was HIV positive. It helped her. And okay, there was another video called, "Just Like Us". So it was all adolescents who were HIV, oh it was back in the Pablo days. Do you remember Pablo who was in "A Different World"? So anyway, he was, it was all about these young people and these young people talking very honestly about their lives. So I showed that to a group of us planning a conference. Then I showed them this other thing full of statistics and... They wanted to go with the statistical sh— And I'm like, "Where's the compassion? The love? Look at these kids. These kids are telling their stories". You have so many people, again, one of the reasons when you think about all of the anti-gay sentiment. Number one, you have a lot of people that have been taught that to be gay is the worst thing on this planet. So they really are, but to deflect attention from who they really are as human beings, they lead this whole anti-gay crusade. Okay? Sad. Full of self-hatred, full of, you know.

0:35:11 Then you have people who, as children, were violated sexually by heterosexuals. Never got any help, never got any support, never, but they blame gay people. Uncle, daddy, brothers. Then you have people who are just afraid of being labeled as the worst thing on this planet. So they get on the bandwagon, so they get with the teasing, with the discrimination, whatever. So all of these horrible things that go into allowing this health issue to be disaffected like that. That this burdening the gay community with this. It's a health issue. HIV is a virus. It's not fixing to stop and to ask you, "Is you gay? Is you straight? Is you rich? Is you poor?"

[KL] Yeah.

[DS] It's just looking for opportunity. But I will say again, when I was talking about the things that gays, blacks, and children all have in common, is this, how this world gives them this lack of self, this whole dehumanizing character about who they are. Young people are taught that they are nothing, they are nobody. You know, too often. But everybody's expected to.

[KL] Be amazing.

[DS] Be amazing.

[KL] And know what to do, and it's their fault.

[DS] Mm-hm. And it's their fault.

[KL] That's what kind of keeps the class system going because you should've known. You should have known. You always should have known.

[DS] And nobody took the time to teach you, you should've known.

[KL] You should've known.

0:36:57 [DS] These are things that just take care of themselves. We don't need to help you. Yeah, you got all of these stigma related things: poverty, the neighborhood that I live in, class system, sexism, racism, all of that. Then you add HIV to that. I would continue not to be amazed by the number of people who don't do because of this fear of what other people will think of them. Just a month or so ago, they had this thing over at IUSB about, "Let's Talk About Sex". Again, trying to get parents— Parents continue to say, "I don't want to teach my children the appropriate terminology for the genitalia because I'm afraid of what other people will think of me. I don't want to equip my children with that kind of knowledge because if other people find out that they are educated and knowledgeable about human sexuality, other people may think badly of me".

[KL] And that's why you probably have a high...

0:37:55 [DS] So, this huge investment in people not having high self-esteem. Poor self-image is the key to, again, why do we want people not educated? Because when people are ignorant, they are powerless. When they are powerless, they are easily oppressed. When they are oppressed, they begin to hate themselves. When they hate themselves, "God damn, we can do whatever we want to to them".

[KL] Yeah.

[DS] And keep them fighting amongst themselves. Again, that's why I say HIV is so relative to absolutely everything else in our universe.

0:38:39 [KL] When you were dealing with people coming in, have you ever dealt with... I'm sure people who are coming into AIDS Ministries talking with you already felt bad about the fact that they had the illness. Did some of them say they were deserving of it?

[DS] To this day they blame themselves. So what did you know that would have allowed you to prevent this? What did you know? And where did you get it from? What were you taught about you? Like when I get clients, I give them assignments. They're very first assignment is, "Who am I?" The next assignment is, "What did I learn about myself as a sexual human being and what did I learn it from?"

[KL] Wow.

[DS] So trying to push them to understand that it's not your fault. The whole thing is to create this buy-in from the masses that there are certain people who are undeserving.

[KL] Exactly.

[DS] Sadly, so many people buy into that and then vote against they own self. But again, how did the Holocaust happen? How did slavery happen? That's how it happened. You get that kind of buy-in from the masses. You get the masses wanting to get to the place that, "I'm so rich and powerful and famous that one day I'll be able to mistreat others". So they allow that stuff to be.

0:40:17 [KL] Before we go, what is the organization? How did you come in from AIDS Ministries to this?

[DS] Okay, I felt that there needed to be a prevention focused organization, but also at the same time, AIDS Ministries needed a partner. Because a lot of the times, it was kind of like functioning alone, even though they could get with coalition with others on some things that they're just... Okay, so what we could have this whole prevention focused entity, to go along with the care services. So, that's when I started this. Plus, I wanted to be able to do very population specific stuff. So, African Americans, people living with HIV, because I always felt, and I always advocated for there to be this humongous focus on people living with HIV. They're the only ones who can spread it. We need to get to them and arm them with enough, with a sense of themselves. The whole thing about getting people diagnosed. Anyway, I set this up. I been here since 2003. The other part was, I needed to be able to do what I felt needed to be done without having to be concerned about anybody else.

[KL] Yeah, all the red tape.

[DS] Yeah, all the red tape. All the people worried about their image in the community and all of that.

[KL] Corporate sponsors.

[DS] I'm on a, yeah, that kind of— I'm on a mission. So yeah, that too.

[KL] So the name, what is it?

0:41:41 [DS] Imani and Unidad. Well, so it's like, "Imani", means faith and it's a Swahili word. Then the "and" is an English word. And, "Unidad" is Spanish for unity. So it's kind of like, "We're all in this together". So trying to— And the other thing that's important to me is cultural competency. To me, cultural competency is the ability to pause long enough to allow the individual or group sitting in front of you at that moment to tell you who

they are and what their needs are. So that's why I'm like, "Well, this is about all of us". You get to determine who you are and what you need, and it's my responsibility as the provider to provide only that and nothing more. So, yeah. So, I don't have a lot of programs, I don't have a lot of funding because I didn't want to get to the place where I was in business just to stay in business. I don't want to be playing to a bunch of different people's fiddles. So, I only pursued that which will allow me to do what I believe needs to be done based on what people, community, has said they want. So, yeah.

[KL] Then, the—

[DS] And I get to work with anybody and everybody.

[KL] So how do you find the people that come in here? Is it word of mouth?

[DS] They find me.

[KL] They find you?

0:43:14 [DS] I have never had to advertise one moment. So, it's kind of like, even when I started at AIDS Ministries, the whole prevention thing, it's just like what I told you we called these people together for this coalition. Well, the guy who was the director at the Housing Authority asked me to come and speak to them just from what I said in that group. There was a teacher at Riley High School, Wally Gartein, who was really an advocate for young people learning. 'Cause he used to have his students write to the CDC for HIV/AIDS information, and then have it mailed to their homes. Yeah. So these were some of my very first teachers. Rabbi Feinstein at Temple Beth-El. Some of the first people that gave me access.

0:44:07 So anyway, I would go to that place and then, I don't care where I went, there would be somebody in the audience. Because that was the other rule I had, invite as many people as possible because we ain't hiding this conversation no more. So get the social worker, the principal, the, whoever, into the room. So we would have like a social worker in his classroom who'd say, "Oh, can you come and speak to the group of social workers?" Then these social workers: "Well, could you come to my school? Well could you...?" So it's always been word of mouth. It was nothing but need. Just seeing the need for somebody somewhere to stand up and shout about this stuff, that was it. Because, again, I'm just like, I grew up in the same kind of repressed, good girl fostering society that everybody else. And what? What has the good girl traditionally meant? Ignorant and powerless. "Don't say nothing. [inaudible]". And no, good girl means that I'm intelligent, informed, I get to decide whether or not I want your penis in my anus. Okay, pumpkin?

[KL] Yeah. When you're going out to the communities, you see a lot of... For me, I feel like, because AIDS is kind of, it's become something that, "Oh, it's old. It's an old disease". They still say that.

0:45:33

[DS] Yeah, people still say that. People still don't want to admit, own it. But, I, the whole thing is still trying to erase the stigma so that more and more people will understand that just like you go and get that finger stick for diabetes, you need to be getting the finger stick for HIV as well. Again, people need to find out early enough, early detection, whether it's heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, the best chances of your living a long, fruitful, productive life, and it's preventable. There's no genetic composition—

[KL] For it.

[DS] Yeah, exactly.

[KL] Do you ever feel that some people, in your counseling work that you, do you ever feel like some young men think that AIDS defines, they almost want to get AIDS or HIV because that's—

[DS] Bug chasers?

[KL] Oh, they have a name? I didn't know there was a name.

[DS] Bug chasers...

[KL] It's like the definition of being officially a gay man.

[DS] Bug chasers. Yeah, you have that, and I was trying to think of the word for that. Oh, uh—

[KL] Bare backing?

0:46:39

[DS] No, no, no. The sympathy... Okay, sometimes it's like, I see all my friends dying, or my partner has it, and I love my partner so much so I want it too. You have the bug chasers, and they could all be classified as bug chasers. But anyway, you have those who see a lot benefit: "Oh, I can get housing, I can get medical insurance, I can get this, I can get that. If I'm positive."

[Audio ends]